

Twelfth Street Car Shops, Master Mechanic's Office
Ninth Avenue and Twelfth Street
Altoona
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-231-C

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

TWELFTH STREET CAR SHOPS, MASTER MECHANIC'S OFFICE

HAER No. PA-231-C

Location: Ninth Avenue and Twelfth Street, Altoona, Blair County, Pennsylvania
USGS Quad: Altoona, Pennsylvania (1:24000)
UTM: 17 E.720320 N.4487810

Date of Construction: 1882, 1896

Builder: Pennsylvania Railroad

Present Owner: Conrail

Present Use: Offices

Significance: The 1882 section of this building is the oldest surviving structure of the former "Machine Shops" branch in Altoona.

Project Information: This project was undertaken by HAER in conjunction with America's Industrial Heritage Project as part of an architectural survey covering a nine-county region in Southwestern Pennsylvania, Randall Cooley, Director. See HAER No. PA-108, Pennsylvania Railroad, Altoona Works, Altoona, Blair County, Pennsylvania for further project information and documentation.

Compiler: Peter Stott, Historian
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History:

In 1879 James Dredge wrote that "The general offices ... are situated in the town at some little distance from the shops. The stores are kept wherever room can be found for them, the present accommodation being extremely bad in this respect. Plans are now being prepared for new buildings, in which the office of the master mechanic and his assistants, physical test department, laboratory, storekeeper's room, and stores will be placed. The building will be commenced shortly." The original 170' x 40' portion of this structure was completed in 1882. The eastern 40' of the building was occupied by the nascent test department, organized in 1874. Physical and chemical laboratories were housed here. To expand these facilities, the building was extended another 30' to the east in 1896, and a third story added to the building. Within a decade, a fourth story had been added. According to the *American Engineer and Railroad Journal* of 1896, the "Chemical Laboratory, under Dr. C.B. Dudley, occupied the third floor and half of the second ... the first floor was devoted to physical tests under the charge of A.W. Gibbs." The Test Department moved out when a new building was completed at the west end of

the yard in 1914. For its additions to the original 1882 building the PRR employed a number of compatible architectural elements including segmental-arched windows with 4-over-4 double-hung wooden sashes, and iron sills. Rising the full height of the building, brick pilasters articulate each of the seventeen bays. The gable ends display full denticular pediments, while the longitudinal facades are highlighted with a metal cornice and shed roof dormers. A denticular belt course also separates the attic story from the three lower floors. Much of the original woodwork remains in the western portion of the building, which is divided from the east by a brick fire wall. The building was located adjacent to the former Twelfth Street Bridge, to which the eastern end gave access via a second-story crosswalk leading to offices in the adjacent firehouse. In the 1960s the PRR's medical offices were located on the upper floors at the eastern end. On the floor below the medical facilities was the Railroad Police office. Although currently abandoned, this building housed Conrail's Allegheny Division offices as late as 1984. Importantly the 1882 section is the oldest surviving structure of the former "Machine Shops" branch in Altoona.

Sources:

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Pennsylvania Railroad Company. 36th and 40th Annual Reports of the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company (1883, 1896).
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